



CHALLENGING THE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH IN LANGUAGE LEARNING MATERIALS

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to challenge the 'one-size-fits-all' approach in curriculum-textbook formulation and to identify language learning materials for students in India. The paper focuses on the different languages scenario that exist in the teaching- learning environment with special reference to education in rural India. Though English has become a global language at the academic, social and political front, there is a wide disparity in the use of English language in India. As a multi-lingual country, India is also host to many languages (scheduled languages, regional languages and minority languages). Often in the quest for education in English, mother tongue gets neglected which in turn hampers the student's language proficiency in L1 and L2. The researcher points out the need to address these concerns to aid education development through document analysis and empirical data. Presently, the priority should be to modify the curriculum to a multilingual curriculum by including learning materials in mother tongue including minority languages and to provide instruction in the same. The question of how far the standardized curriculum that was implemented with the aim to increase parity across the educational system has worked is also addressed.

KEYWORDS: one-size-fits-all approach, educational system in India, national curriculum framework, rural education.

INTRODUCTION:

A country's economic and social progress depends on a lot on the education development of the country. Education growth is one of the fundamental factors of development in this fast-paced world. Post-independence, India has strived to develop the literacy rate of the country. The positive link that literacy has on a country's economic growth and individual's earnings have pushed Indian government to invest more revenue into the educational sector over the years. With initiatives like providing free and basic education for children aged 6 to 14, India has been taking steps in the right direction. However, there still exists a lot of disparity in how education is being imparted across India. One very important aspect is the scope of English in the Indian curriculum. Post the British Raj regime in India, English language has donned a very important role in India. Though there are several aspects that play a role in how education is imparted, this paper attempts to discuss one elementary aspect in the education field, that is the different languages that exist in the teaching-learning environment of the student. The Indian Constitution recognizes 22 scheduled languages which comprises the major languages with more than a million speakers. There are also several other regional and minority languages (1652 mother tongues- 1961 Census of India). It is therefore interesting to note the role these languages have alongside English in the curriculum and how such a curriculum fares in the Indian educational system.

Presently, in India, the one-size-fits-all curriculum is the approach in the educational system. The 'one-size-fits-all' approach refers to a single approach taken to meet all ends. In the field of education system, individual educational growth is the most important goal. However, assuming every learner together as an individual does not aid in individual educational development and later success. Though education is compulsory and free (Right to Education act, RTE 2009), in a scenario with disparity in teaching-learning context it becomes a moot point as individual education growth gets suppressed in the goal of a greater literacy rate. True, everyone gains basic literacy skill but how many are equipped enough for individual growth. The difference in the % population enrolled in higher secondary contrasted against % enrolled in the upper primary points this out. Prior research has pointed out the need for teachers to adapt curriculum according to the student's levels and needs. However, this is a burden that must not be solely carried out by the teachers rather it must primarily be factored in at the curriculum design level.

BACKGROUND:

In India, after independence from the British rule, English received constitutional recognition as the language for all official purposes of the Union. Article 343 of the then Indian Constitution designated Hindi as the official language and provided the continued use of English for official purposes for a period of 15 years. But after nine years, the report of the Official Language Commission of India recommended the extended use of English. English, thus became the associate official language. However, in a multilingual country like India, even though English-speaking population is huge, it is not an accurate reflection of English in the educational system of India.

The need to include English in the educational system as a medium of instruction and a compulsory subject across India follows the practice of English instruction being provided at college level during the British regime. During the British Raj

regime, Thomas Macaulay (1835) argued the need to refine the vernacular dialects of the country by introducing words from the Western Hemisphere. He urged the use of borrowed terms to form a class of people that were, "Indians in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect" (Macaulay, Minute on Education (1835)). Following this, William Bentinck, the then Governor General of The Company ordered English to be the medium of instruction in the oriental colleges. Later, his successor, Auckland initiated steps to establish a comprehensive educational system in India with English at the forefront. However, with the socioeconomic disparity and political instability that followed after India's independence, it took several years to formulate an educational policy that would seriously regulate education in the independent India.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) established in 1961 and the National Policy on Education in 1986 paved the way for serious curriculum studies and reforms. By 1986 National Policy on Education reiterated the 1968 Three- Language Formula i.e. In the Hindi speaking states, the languages taught must be Hindi, English and any other Indian language. In the non-Hindi speaking states, the languages taught are the regional language, English and Hindi. This regional language is one among the 22 scheduled languages that has a relatively high speaking population in the state and is recognized by the Indian constitution. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 highlighted the need to uphold the multi-lingual character of Indian society. It is the NCF 2005 that has been instrumental in providing the guidelines for different states to set their own independent framework. Accordingly, every state government has formulated their own framework and published textbooks. However, there is a wide gap between the curriculum and the actual textbooks on account of several points. Though the framework tries to provide accountability to everyone regardless of the language environment, a hypothetical scenario is presumed on account of practicality. The disparity in economic growth, physical settlement location, exposure to language are some of the points. This is specifically relevant with respect to the educational system in rural India. Another point of disparity is in the English teaching- learning environment that exist in the country. With English increasing becoming the medium of instruction and the percentage of rise in the number of English schools by both government and the private sector, this disparity must be addressed as to its effect caused by the curriculum and textbook. The question of why this needs to be addressed is also provided. Also discussed is the role that English medium instruction has on the individual state medium of instruction.

LEARNING CONTEXT OF ENGLISH AND OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES IN INDIA:

As depicted earlier, the status of the language is decided by the political importance given to the language. A language can thus become a first language, second language or foreign language. So, there are universally three different contexts of English teaching and learning: English as a first language, English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Braj B. Kachru's (1986) concept of three concentric circles provides a better understanding of English language context in different countries. In this framework, there are the three different circles; inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. The inner circle comprises native speakers of English and English-speaking countries (United Kingdoms, United States of America, Australia and etc.). The outer circle comprises speakers and countries where English has acquired a role of national

importance in spite of English not being a native language (India, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia and etc.). The expanding circle comprises countries where English has not acquired a role of national importance nor has it been of historical importance but has slowly started recognizing English as lingua franca (China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Taiwan and etc.). Accordingly, in India, English has gained importance as a compulsory subject in the curriculum and is taught as a second language in the educational system. However, the English language teaching-learning situations are heterogeneous on account of the variation in English proficiency across teachers and the learner's exposure to English outside the class room. In rural India, there arises the question of uniformity in defining English solely as a second language in India. Presently, with the implementation of Three-language Formula there is a disparity in teaching English across different states and schools. English has thus differed in its treatment by being a first language, second language and third language.

According to Hakan Ringbom (1980), the distinction between English as second language and English as foreign language must depend on the 'particular environment where the learner has to live'. He argues that a failure to regard this distinction 'shows a neglect of the individual learner'. There is thus a distinction between two learning environments of a learner- the second language learning versus the foreign language learning that is dependent on the scope of immediate environment of the learner. In the former, the language is spoken in the immediate environment and the learner has ample opportunities to use the language while in the latter the language is not spoken in the immediate environment and there are virtually very less opportunities for the speaker to use the language. This factor contrasts Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In India, the demarcation between the two contexts is vividly evident in teaching and learning contexts of schools in rural areas and in urban areas. Most importantly, the urban schools can have an outside classroom exposure to English language when compared against schools in rural areas. Also, in many scenarios, the existing Indian languages are often neglected. The differences in demographic features gives rise to several different scenarios that can be accommodated only by depreciating the importance given to the one-size-fits-all approach in curriculum formulation.

EDUCATION IN RURAL INDIA:

In rural India, education system continues to be a victim of lack of focus on language, lack of proper resources dedicated to tribal education. The Annual Status Education Report (ASER) 2018 points to the reality of the educational system in rural districts of India. The ASER focusses on basic reading and arithmetic levels of children aged 5 to 16 age groups across rural India. The latest study has been conducted in 596 districts in rural India by NGO Pratham. From the study it was observed that 27.2% of children in Std III could read a Std II level text, 50% of children in Std V could read a Std II level text. (50.3%) and only about 73% of enrolled students in Std VIII (last compulsory year of education according to Article 21-A, in the constitution Act, 2002) could read a Std II level text (number unchanged from 2016). The gap is evident in the previous ASER reports of 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013, 2014 and 2016 (figure 1). This reading assessment evaluated students' level of reading with respect to the State prescribed curriculum (L1).

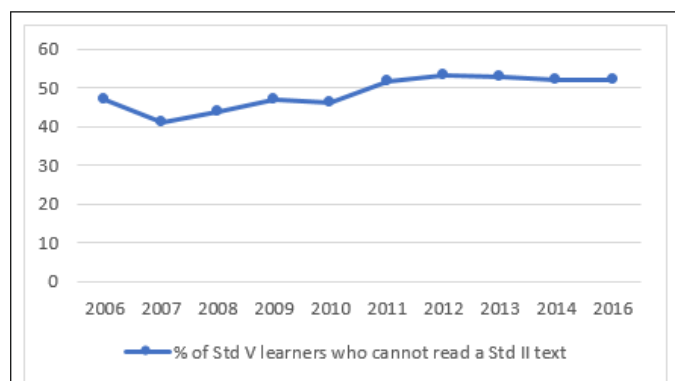


Figure 1: Literacy level of L1 (ASER 2006-2016)

The ASER 2019 'Early Years' shows that in Std III, only 46.1% of children aged 7 and 53.4% children aged 8 were able to read a Std I text. The reading text in these data is the language of the respective medium of instruction (L1). That data thus shows that the students are not fluent in their own language or the State language. In 2012, ASER provided simple English reading and comprehension tasks to students in Std V across rural India. The result showed that only 48.9% students could read English words or more and only 22.5% students could read simple English sentences. This significantly shows that English ends up being a foreign language to these students. ASER Trends Over Time report 2006-2014 presents information on the students' ability to read English for the years 2007, 2009, 2012 and 2014. The data depicts a decline in the % of students that can read English (refer figure 2). This is troubling as the number of schools and students enrolled have only increased over the years.

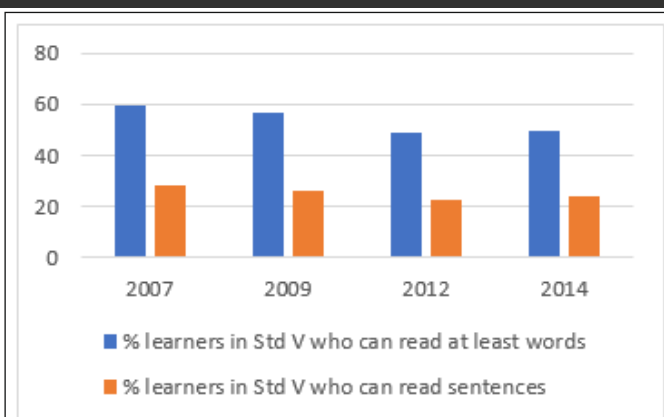


Figure 2: Assessment of English reading over the years (ASER, 2006-2014)

The 7th All India Education Survey, 2002 (AISES) reports the number of schools in rural, urban area at different stages of education across different states in the country. The data also provides us with number of schools in the different medium of instruction. In comparison with the 8th AISES initiated in 2009 (2016), there has been a decline in the number of schools at the primary stage with the mother tongue as medium of instruction- 92.07% in the 7th survey to 86.62% in the 8th survey. The schools with mother tongue as medium of instruction in rural areas has also decreased with an increase in schools with a different medium of instruction (English)- 92.39% in the 7th survey to 87.56% in the 8th survey. This is in spite of the increase in the number of schools at the primary stage- 8,50,421 schools in the 7th survey to 10,31,361 schools in the 8th survey. There has also been an increase in the number of schools at the Upper primary level - 3,37,980 to 4,72,350, at the Secondary level- 1,30,675 to 1,74,240 and at the Higher Secondary level- 43,869 to 62,663. In the 8th survey, schools with English as a medium of instruction has also increased (table 1).

Table 1: % of schools with English as medium of instruction (6th-8th Survey)

	% of number of schools with English as medium of instruction			
Survey	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
6 th	4.99	15.91	18.37	28.09
7 th	12.98	18.25	25.84	33.59
8 th	15.49	21.08	28.73	33.06

Presently, rural education also suffers from the lack of attention given to tribal education. Though over the years there has been a substantial rise in the numbers, there is still a long way to go. According to Census of India 2011, scheduled tribes form 11.3% of the total population in rural India and 2.8% in urban India. Literacy rate in India has gone from 28.3% in 1961 to 74.04% in 2011 and literacy rate of scheduled tribe has climbed to 58.95% in 2011 from 8.54% in 1961 (table 2). There is also an increase in the enrolment ratio of boys and girls across the scheduled tribe population over the years (1961 to 2011). However, the literacy rate of scheduled tribe rural population is significantly way less compared to the literacy rate of its counterpart, scheduled tribe urban population.

Table 2 : Literacy rate % of population- Total Population (TP), Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) (Census of India 2011)

Year	Population	% Male	% Female	Total %	Literacy gap %
1961	TP	40.4	15.35	28.3	
	SC	16.96	3.29	10.27	18.03
	ST	13.83	3.16	8.54	19.76
1971	TP	45.96	21.97	34.45	
	SC	22.36	6.44	14.67	19.8
	ST	17.63	4.85	11.39	23.06
1981	TP	56.38	29.76	52.21	
	SC	31.12	10.93	21.38	22.19
	ST	24.52	8.05	16.35	27.22
1991	TP	64.13	39.29	52.21	
	SC	49.91	23.76	37.41	14.8
	ST	40.65	18.19	29.6	22.61
2001	TP	75.26	53.67	64.83	
	SC	66.64	41.9	57.49	7.34
	ST	59.17	34.76	47.1	17.73
2011	TP	82.14	65.46	74.04	
	SC	75.17	56.46	66.07	7.97
	ST	68.51	49.36	58.95	15.09

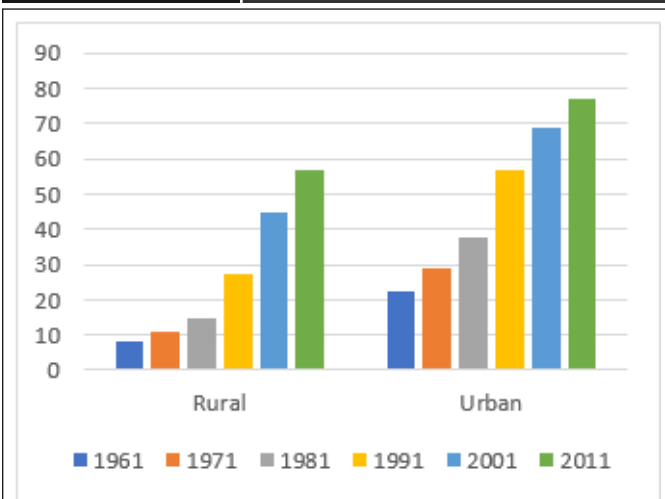


Figure 3 : % Literacy rate of scheduled tribes - Rural and Urban

DISCUSSION:

From the reports so far, it can be seen that a decline in the number of schools that provide mother tongue as medium of instruction does not augment scenarios of teaching and learning English language. Rather it provides an additional constraint with respect to first generation school goers and learning environments. With the stark difference between the medium of instruction and the language used at home, students end up with less comprehension skills as observed in the ASER report. From figure 1, it can be observed that the literacy level of L1 too decreased over the years. This prompts the question of whether there is a link between L1 and L2 literacy levels. With the emergent desire to popularize English learning, students often end up with a poor L1 proficiency. Prior research in the area of language acquisition and language learning have pointed out that second language is acquired through integration with the first language. There have been lot of theories put forward on the role of the first language in the classroom. One theory state that students with strong language skills in their first language can learn second language easily (Cummins, 2000). Another theory points out to the interference caused by first language on the second language referred to as language transfer. However, when there is a strong foundation in L1, there is relatively a greater chance of positive transfer rather than negative transfer.

A study conducted by Mara Salmona M. (2014) points out the same through a case study. It identified whether the use of L1 increases comprehension and second language acquisition through two reading activity lesson plans. One lesson plan used only English while the other lesson plan used both languages, English and Spanish. The study aimed at answering two main questions: the impact of developing first language on second language acquisition and whether increasing the number of Spanish hours showed any progress in proficiency. Through a qualitative data collection, the analysed results found that students who had strong language skills in L1 were able to acquire second language more easily. The students were more interested and engaged in lesson that used code switching. The analysis also showed that by developing L1 as a support in the second language, learning process was easier for both teachers and students. The same is the case when a minority language is spoken as L1 (home language in this context). Popularly, it is argued that in this scenario it is necessary to introduce English at the earliest in the learning environment. However, in studies by Genesee and Geva (2006) and Riches and Genesee (2006), children who had a well-developed minority language (home language) were able to pick up English more easily compared to other children who had not obtained knowledge in their language. Minority language students who obtained academic instruction in their home language in school performed much better, had a higher level of proficiency and English literacy skills compared to minority language students who were instructed solely in English (Genesee, 2008).

Language associations and links are thus very crucial for learner's cognitive development. In India, students go through a simultaneous process of second language acquisition and second language learning. On account of the early introduction of English language in Std 1 in numerous states and the increased number of schools with English as medium of instruction, there is a subconscious process of acquiring the language without explicit knowledge of grammatical rules. But this is only possible in a scenario where first language skills are developed. This highlights the importance of L1 and signals the urgent need to integrate the teaching of language. Effectively so, English language cannot stand alone in the curriculum rather it should find its place among the other Indian languages. This will also help in reducing the 'perceived hegemony' of English language (NCF 2005).

One aspect to be noted is that in the formulation of textbooks, many states that provide English as a medium of instruction and the regional language as medium of instruction often have the same English textbooks to be taught across all the schools (Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and etc.). This

single textbook practice was introduced to increase parity among students across all medium of instruction. However, this is a huge drawback when one considers the result of the same textbook catering to two completely different teaching and learning context.

From the AISES 2014 report, it can be observed that English reading levels (the comprehension skill, the ability to understand meaning of words and sentences) over the years have decreased. The ASER report 2011, recommends the need to bring a revision in the textbooks to keep it at a more realistic and appropriate level for the students. It also posits the need to include specific mother tongue instruction in the language classrooms and the need to introduce programmes for language transition. On account of the lack of exposure of outside classroom English language, the textbooks are given more importance and becomes the source of all information. This is very significant as close to 20% of children are first generation school goers in rural India. A dual-language curriculum format would thus go a long way in rectifying this scenario.

The fact that the literacy gap between the general population and scheduled tribe population is narrowing down is a welcoming development (figure 3). However, there is still significant vacancy in the secondary and higher grades of tribal education. The 7.5% of reserved jobs provided both in central and state governments still are vacant on account of the lack of education qualification and necessary skills. At the initial level in the education system, the government has taken up several initiatives to aid tribal development and growth of education- the Ashram school concept, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, setting up of adult centres and so on. However, the lack of a curriculum that enables the students to link to their life, their culture and history results in a decline in the growth of higher education. There is also a lesser enrolment ratio of students to higher secondary. So itself, a revised curriculum would aid the teaching and learning context of tribal education by incorporating facilities for providing instruction in their respective language for students belonging to linguistic minority group The Indian Constitution Article 350 safeguards the minority population by stressing the need to provide instruction in mother tongue. It also stresses the right to conserve the distinct language, script or culture of the scheduled tribes. Accordingly, the curriculum can be prepared in their language. An additional remedy would be to shape a vocational curriculum that would suit the local needs and necessary requirements of the tribal people to earn daily living. The tribal folklore, culture literature and ethnology should also find its way into the curriculum. Initiative should be taken to introduce tribal history and culture to both tribal and non-tribal children. This practice will help in ensuring a decline in the minority stigma that children go through in their life.

In rural India, irrespective of the above factors, financial background and family background also plays a role in the education system. ASER reports points out the differences that 'pacca' (bricks or concrete) houses and 'kuccha' (mud) houses have on the literacy rate. Also, another dependent factor was the number of outside learning materials or number of books present in the home of the children. Additionally, education growth is affected by the demographic location. This is specifically true with tribal education. For example, some tribes are distributed in the forest areas which reduces feasibility to provide education while some other tribes have an increased exposure to outside population. Economic development of tribes also effects the overall growth and interaction with the rest of the society. Also, some tribal societies have a richer history of documentation and preservation of their socio-cultural elements and language. Thereby these tribal societies have been able to come the fore-front while several others still suffer. In this regard, much has to be done to provide physical feasibility, increase awareness, preservation of linguistics and ethnic endangerment before curriculum in education system can be discussed about.

Andhra Pradesh government started the first experimental pilot programme in tribal education in 2003. Accordingly, eight tribal languages were introduced in selected schools across the state. In 2017, Odisha became the second state to launch the multilingual education programme. Odisha has a tribal population of 22.85% which constitute 9.2% of India's tribal population. The programme was initially launched in ten tribal languages to counter the high drop-out of the tribal population when compared to the other drop-out population in the state. The programme was implemented in schools where around 90% of students belonged to the tribal population. The mother tongue was provided as a medium of instruction in classes I to V, Odia as a subject in class II and English as subject in class III (Mohanty et al. (2009)). By 2014, Odisha became the first state in India to have a comprehensive functional Multilingual Education (MLE) policy. However, there are still tribal languages that needs to be included in the education.

Recently, education in the mother tongue of the tribal children (local dialect) realized its inception in North Kerala in November, 2019 (Manoj, 2019). Under the initiative of the Samagra Shiksha Kerala (SSK), a state-level project, lessons were imparted in the mother tongue (the local dialect) of the tribal children. For this purpose, modules and materials were prepared in 9 languages for children aged six to eight. The original Malayalam content prescribed by Kerala SCERT were translated into the tribal languages. Around 118 volunteers were also trained for this purpose. This initiative was taken up to reduce the high number of drop-outs among tribal children and to ensure full enrolment in schools by bridging the gap between their language and the medium of instruction, Malayalam. The tribal children belonging to the Paniya tribe (the largest tribal community in

Kerala) were the first to be taught in their mother tongue. Some of the other languages include Kattumayikka, Oorali, Adiya and Kurichya. Another step in the initiative was to appoint mentors from their own tribal community to reduce alienation and to provide an open and safe environment. The venture was observed to be a huge success with positive comments and feedback from parents. These examples rightly portrays how introducing mother tongue/local dialect as a medium of instruction for tribal children can become a reality and success.

CONCLUSION:

The above discussion does not demean what all has been and is done in the educational industry. Rather, it points out particular scenarios that should be given importance. Many of these concerns discussed above are addressed in the curriculum however, there exists a wide gap between the framework and actual textbook. To summarize, some of the steps that can be taken are formulating textbooks to bridge the gap between the mother tongue/ local dialect and the state (regional) language, providing additional language resource materials for rural/tribal children and inclusion of tribal culture and ethnicity. Practically, the one-size-fits-all approach can only be modified at the primary and upper primary. However, from the empirical data, it can be seen that a change to multilingual education will bring about a change in the bigger picture.

Though RTE has been very influential in ensuring literacy for all students, the effective allocation of resources by the government has been flawed. The failure to meet the mandated physical, financial and requirements of human resources has also impacted the students' overall learning outcome. This is specifically crucial when students move on to higher grades of secondary and higher education. In addition to all these different contexts in the educational system, there are also different learning styles that mandates different teaching methodologies. One of the remedies posed for this is a child-centred curriculum that aims at constructive knowledge by NCERT through NCF 2005. However, even such a designed curriculum has not been able to effectively aid every student's educational growth. Presently, introduction of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in classrooms and teaching, learning materials has been a huge step in the right direction in the educational sector but the extent to which this has been implemented and has impacted the educational growth has to be analysed. In a country like India that claims 74.04% literacy rate, it is high time that we make sure to increase the parity in educational growth among students.

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